ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A stylet-free epidural catheter for insertion into a patient via a needle defining proximally a needle hub and distally a needle tip, includes a catheter having a proximal end, a distal end, and a body connecting the ends. The body

5 defines therealong a stiffening section of a predetermined length disposed a predetermined distance proximally of the distal end such that it is located generally about an area where the body approaches a needle hub when the distal end approaches a needle tip. The stiffening section has a flexural stiffness at least twice that of the remainder of the body. A thread assist device to reduce buckling of a

10 catheter being inserted through a needle, includes a body defining a TAD proximal end, a TAD distal end substantially spaced apart along a longitudinal axis from the TAD proximal end, and a TAD sidewall connecting the TAD ends. The TAD distal end is configured and dimensional for at least partial receipt and releasable maintenance within a hub of a needle, and the TAD sidewall is configured and

15 dimensioned intermediate the TAD ends to enable axial sliding manipulation of the catheter through the needle hub by a user. The TAD ends substantially preclude non-axial movement of the catheter at the TAD ends and the TAD sidewall limits non-axial movement of the catheter between the TAD ends.